2:Gough E-4, 5 (1947-1949)1961 A W11 Kerala A W11
Central Kerala Nayar

castes, or receive customary help from their enangar at life-crisis ceremonies. If the ostracism was not effected it was believed that the whole neighborhood would fall into disfavor with the caste goddess and might become prey to epidemic or crop failure.

The point on which I am uncertain is whether the lineage as a whole was ostracized, or whether other branches of the lineage normally retained their caste status by severing their own connections with the offender's property group. The latter actually occurred in a case in Cochin in 1924. A Sudra Nayar woman had sex relations with a man of the caste of Nayar funeral priests. Shortly after the assembly met, the other houses of her lineage repudiated all connection with the offender's household, which alone remained ostracized for a year. The woman and her lover then fled to Malaya. The household paid its fine and was reaccepted to caste. I do not know whether it was possible under native rule for a lineage to repudiate its responsibilities in this way.

Minor offenses, such as dining with low-caste people, were settled by the offender's property group paying a fine to the village temple. The offender and his household were purified from their pollution by certain ritual acts. They then gave a feast to their enanger at which they were publicly reaccepted to caste. Traditionally, graver offenses (such as the one above) met harsher penalties. The caste's judgment on such an offense traditionally had to be ratified by the district chief or by a royal officer. The offender was then either executed by his immediate matrilineal kin or surrendered to the king for sale into slavery. His household members performed his funeral rites and only then were they taken back into caste.

Whether or not the lineage as a whole was held collectively responsible for offenses against the religious law of the caste, it was not held responsible for civil wrongs judged by the village headman or for crimes judged by the chief or by officers of the royal court. The property group, headed by its kāranavan, and not the whole lineage, was responsible in cases of theft, debt, or other offenses concerning property which were judged by the village headman. With regard to a major crime, a Nayar who murdered another was tried in the court of the king or of a higher chief. If the murdered man was of the same or a higher caste than the murderer, the murderer was executed by a small group of Nayars selected by the judge. If the murdered man was of lower caste, the murderer's property group had to pay a fine to the district chief. Again, if a Nayar of any rank committed treason

2:Gough E-4, 5 (1947-1949)1961 A Wil Kerala A Wil
Central Kerala Nayar

of matrilineal kinswomen against accusations of incest with a lineage kinsman or of adultery with a low-caste man. Interestingly, these two forms of slander still occasion the bitterest inter-lineage disputes in modern villages.

Third, if a Nayar murdered another of the same rank, his lineage kin had the customary right to carry the corpse into the courtyard of the murderer's property group and burn corpse and house together. The royal and chiefly powers seem to have sanctioned this act as a form of private vengeance while reserving for themselves the right of trial and execution of the murderer.

In the law of the kingdom, therefore, the lineage was not recognized as a unit having legal responsibility for its members' acts. The state vested it with no property and no internal structure of authority. Its members were not required to accept responsibility for one another's crimes and civil offenses nor were they accorded the right of unrestricted vengeance. They were merely *permitted* (probably as a concession to more ancient custom) to support one another in certain restricted situations, provided they acknowledged the superior authority of the kingdom's judicial agents.

I have written of lineages as groups of true matrilineal kin, and so they often were. However, some procedure seems to have been found necessary to adjust the lineage system to the territorial organization. We saw that segments might hive off to other neighborhoods; this must have become more common as sales of landlord and tenant rights increased during the period of European trade. My informants in one Cochin village told me that traditionally, when a lineage segment moved to a new village, its members were adopted as retainers and tenants by the local landlord. They were accepted into the assembly of their new neighborhood and permitted to perform their first tāli rite jointly with some established lineage. Presumably they also took over the enangar of this lineage. In any case my informants thought it would be necessary to obtain the sanction of the chief or, in areas of temple management, of a Brahman legal authority called a Vaidigan, to obtain new enangar ties within a neighborhood. The joint performance of the tāli rite set up a bond of fictitious matrilineal kinship between the old lineage and the incoming segment so that their members had thenceforth to observe exogamy.

This procedure served to provide newcomers with ceremonial and marriage partners and to induct them into the microcosmic political life of the neighborhood. The new members, however, were apparently never completely accepted as "true" matrilineal kin. Thus death and

The Killing or assault of a Nayar

outside the lineage led to feuds between lineages or between larger territorial units. In Cochin, the king had more power than in Kottayam to curtail such feuds or confine them to organized duels for which a fee must be paid. Minor offences against caste law, such as dining with low caste persons, were tried by the subcaste assembly of the village and resulted in temporary excommunication of the offender's property group and the payment of a fine to the village goddess's temple.

The *kāranavan* had the legal right to punish offences within the property group and also those offences against caste law for which the caste held the property group responsible until justice had been done. Incest and murder within the lineage appear to have been punished by expulsion from the *taravād* by the *kāranavan* and from the caste by the caste assembly. In cases of grave insubordination by a junior member, the *kāranavan* had the right to deny him maintenance or access to the ancestral house until he mended his behavior.

Thus the supernatural agents of the village and the *taravād* primarily acted to force the human authorities to carry out their judicial duties. If, for example, the caste failed to excommunicate the *taravād* of an individual who had sinned against its religious laws, it was believed that the village goddess would strike the village with epidemic, flood, or some such misfortune. Similarly, if incest within the lineage went undetected or unpunished, the lineage ghosts and the patron goddess might cause the offenders to die or might bring misfortune on the *taravād* as a whole.

The fact that any member of the *taravād* may suffer as a result of the misdemeanors of any other, carries into the realm of supernatural sanctions the collective responsibility of the *taravād* in social and legal affairs. If a man breaks a ritual rule of the caste, his whole *taravād* is polluted and liable for excommunication. If a death or birth occurs, the whole lineage is temporarily polluted and excluded from normal social life. At the back of these norms lies the fact that the *taravād* is an economic and legal corporation. Its property is owned jointly, and the *taravād* is responsible for the debts of any one member. Its male members must support each other in feuds against other lineages. It is not surprising that the concept of being members one of another in secular affairs is projected into the realm of mystical retributions.

The points at which supernatural agents might replace, or act instead of, human authorities, appear to have been those where a subordinate was wronged by one who was himself a powerful authority and could manipulate the law. Thus lineage ghosts were probably particularly effective in punishing or setting to rights misdemeanors of the *kāranavan* himself. I am uncertain whether, in traditional law, junior members could sue in court for the deposition of an erring *kāranavan*. They certainly possessed this right in British law, but even so, it was very difficult before 1933 to get rid of a *kāranavan*. The lineage ghosts appear to have provided important sanctions against a *kāranavan's* misdoings, for they brought misfortune on a *taravād* whose *kāranavan* disgraced its reputation for hospitality or squandered its property. I was told that the former custom by which a junior member might be possessed by a ghost and voice its threats to the *taravād* added force to the complaints of young men who were cheated by their *kāranavans*. The fact that only the *kāranavan* may propitiate the lineage ghosts points up both his responsibility to the ghosts to ensure good conduct and prosperity in his *taravād*, and also his responsibility to his juniors to ensure the favor of the ghosts.

I have myself recorded no case in which lineage ghosts were believed to have actually prevented a crime on the part of a *kāranavan*, as distinct from punishing one. V. K.

4: Gough E-5 (1947-1949, 1952)1958 AWII Kerala AWII
Nayar

to lineage ghosts who were junior to them in age. The living of the *taravād* themselves make offerings to them and do them obeisance, whereas the ghosts of hostile serfs are especially polluting and malevolent and can be propitiated only by persons of their own caste.

Even so, the ghost of such a lower caste person who is honored for heroism by the *taravād* of his masters may, if he died violently, be feared as an alien ghost by other *taravāds*. In Kottayam in the eighteenth century, for example, there lived a certain Nāyar village headman who had as his servant a man of the Tiyyar caste of cultivators. During the invasions of Malabar by the Mysorean Muslim general, Tippu Sultan, in the 1780's, the Nāyar's *taravād* was threatened with conquest and forcible conversion to Islam. Having sent the women and children of his house into hiding, the *kāranavan* prayed before his lineage's patron goddess until the Muslims were at his gates. He then persuaded his Tiyyar servant to kill him, being unwilling to face the disgrace of circumcision at the hands of the Muslims. Having slain his master, the servant hid himself in an outhouse of the *taravād*. In the night he went forth and attacked the Muslims single-handed, killing several of them to avenge his master, before he was himself put to death. The ghost of this servant is now propitiated along with the lineage ghosts of his master's *taravād*. It is also, however, propitiated as an alien ghost by several other *taravāds* in the neighborhood.

Occasionally, malevolent alien ghosts are those of Nāyars who died violently, often in expiation of some crime. They may have committed suicide after being outcaste for contravention of religious laws, or in the case of a woman, may have been killed by their matrilineal kinsmen after cohabiting with low caste men. A woman called Kadangōtt Makkam, also of Kottayam, became a ghost in this way. According to legend, she was suspected by her sister-in-law of having sexual relations with an Oilmonger. Her brothers banished her from the *taravād*. She was agonized at the thought of leaving her children, and drowned them in the *taravād's* well. Her *kāranavan* and brothers were then obliged to stab her to death—the customary penalty for fornication outside the caste, and perhaps, also, for murder within the *taravād*. She became an alien ghost particularly liable to prevent women from bearing children, and is established in the gardens of several local *taravāds*.

Such alien ghosts, although Nāyar, are also propitiated by an officiant of the lower caste. The propitiant is usually from some caste which specializes in exorcism and counter-magic, such as Mannāns (washermen), Kanisans (astrologers, who in any case diagnose the misfortune and advise the propitiation) or Pānans (umbrella-makers, exorcists and agricultural workers). The mode of propitiation is the same as in the case of a low caste ghost.

Finally, an alien ghost is occasionally that of a Brahman who died violently. Brahman ghosts, or Brahmarākṣas, unlike all other ghosts, must be propitiated with vegetarian offerings by a Brahman priest hired for the purpose. But Brahman priests, unlike low caste officiants, never enter a state of voluntary possession by ghosts. Religious possession is particularly a low caste institution. It is not practiced by Brahmans, and when found among Nāyars, it is practiced by young men, women, and other persons who lack secular power. Brahmans do not need to become possessed by their ghosts and deities, for they have the power to demand whatever offerings and fees they require. Low caste propitiants need the authority of a supernatural agent in order to make demands on their high caste masters.